

Identity for Women: A Proposal for the gendered *imago Dei* based on 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Katherine Abetz

Abstract: 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 has long been a contentious text with regard to gender relationships and the *imago Dei*. For women in particular, Augustine's and Barth's interpretations of this text fail to establish embodied identity, while feminist anthropomorphisms are no cure for this lack. This article argues that, with regard to gender and human identity, the *imago Dei* is best understood in terms of relations between male and female at three "levels": divine, divine-human and human. Human gendered identity is derived from the Trinitarian pattern of relations, as well as from the reversal of female and male, noted at the human level in 1 Cor 11:11-12 and applicable to the relation of Mary and Christ. Notwithstanding the masculine bias of Augustine's interpretation of the text, his recognition of the Son as the Father's Word, known also as Wisdom, not only supplies the source of women's generic identity but also reveals a non-remote cosmological first cause, presented as feminine in relation to the Father while masculine in relation to redeemed humanity.

IN THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY FOR WOMEN, a recent trend claims the right to depict God in the semblance of women on the assumption that the biblical writers also followed this pattern on terms favouring men. A God seen in a feminine guise is presented as an aid to the flourishing of women. Elizabeth A. Johnson offers such a perception of God as a partial expression of the symbolic order of male and female *in the image of God*.¹ Such a claim overlooks the fact that God on such terms is *in the*

1. "Naming towards God from the perspective of women's dignity..., SHE WHO IS discloses women's human nature as *imago Dei*" (Elizabeth A. Johnson, *SHE WHO IS: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* [New York: Crossroad, 1994] 242-43); see also p.13. Johnson also writes: "[O]ne criterion recurs as a touchstone for testing the truth and falsity, the adequacy and inadequacy, the coherence and incoherence of theological statements and religious structures. This criterion...is the emancipation of women

image of women rather than the other way around. The assumption that the biblical writers were unreliably biased in depicting God casts doubt on biblical reliability in general, including the reliability of the biblical claim that gendered humanity is made in God's image.

But while the method does not appear to me to promote satisfactorily the flourishing of women, I believe there is some justice in the claim that Christian understanding of the *imago Dei* has tended to favour men at the expense of women. In saying so, I stand on the tradition that the biblical writers depict the God who IS in Augustine's sense² and not a constructed IS in the sense implied by Elizabeth A. Johnson's proposed SHE WHO IS.³ In this context I suggest that we look once again at 1 Cor 11:1-16 in search of what Paul has to say about male and female in God's image, in particular as this applies to women.

I begin with the method for establishing identity for women employed by Luce Irigaray and developed by Catherine Keller in interpreting Genesis 1. I then draw attention to a similar method (favouring men) in the argumentation for the *imago Dei* on the part of Augustine and Karl Barth. Thirdly, I shall take up and expand an interpretation of 1 Cor 11:1-16 offered by Augustine's translator, Edmund Hill. The fourth section compares Augustine's and Barth's presentation of Wisdom, upholding Augustine's assumption that the Word and Wisdom are one and the same, the one through whom the world was made. I argue the relevance of this to women as a divine source for their identity, in contrast to Catherine Keller's presentation of the *tehom* of Genesis 1:2 as primordial "feminized chaos".⁴

towards human flourishing." (ibid. 30): As a "particularly clear articulation of this criterion", Johnson quotes Rosemary Radford Ruether: [W]hatever...denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine.... what does promote the full humanity of women is of the Holy" (*Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* [Boston: Beacon, 1983] 18-19). Compare also Ruether again: "Feminist theology starts with anthropology, rather than deducing male-female relations from an *a priori* definition of God. The definition of God as patriarchal male is presumed to be a projection by patriarchal males of their own self-image...upon God. Thus it is not "man" who is made in God's image, but God who has been made in man's image.... A feminist theology...constructs images of God that will better...promote the full realization of human potential for women and men" ("*Imago Dei*, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics", in Kari Elisabeth Børresen (ed.), *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaic-Christian Tradition* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995] 286-87).

2. See *Confessions VII, 10* (translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, p. 147.)

3. "Women's experience of self interpreted as experience of God...comes to a theological flashpoint when women begin to articulate...as *imago Dei*" (*SHE WHO IS*, 69).

4. See Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: a Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), xvi – xvii; 15-19.

A MIRROR FOR BECOMING WOMEN?

A search for identity for women through symbolic meaning is evident in recent women's studies, in particular in the writings of radical feminist, Luce Irigaray.⁵

Irigaray seeks identity for women in a proposed "divine dimension" in the *matriarchal* line in contrast to the "divine dimension" credited to the "man-father" of biblical story or patriarchal genealogy. Margaret Whitford, Irigaray's editor, writes:

What Irigaray is concerned with is the possible alterity of "woman-for-herself", instead of woman simply as the "other of the same"... The central condition would be a maternal genealogy, so that the daughter could situate herself in her identity with respect to her mother. The maternal should have a spiritual and divine dimension, and not be relegated to the merely carnal, leaving the divine to the genealogy of the father.... the divine is related to the question of woman's generic identity in the symbolic order: "Women lack a mirror for becoming women". The divine can be seen as a kind of mirror or ideal which women need in order to mediate relationships between themselves.⁶

Irigaray distances herself from a traditional feminist desire for *equality* with men, in the sense of being "the other of the same", in favour of sexual difference. Her method of establishing identity for women follows the method attributed by her to "the genealogy of the father". She claims that "the spiritual and divine dimension" can similarly be attributed to the genealogy of the mother.

In Irigaray's conception the divine is said to be related to the "question of woman's generic identity in the symbolic order". But on her terms the divine presence owes its existence to women's sense of what should be attributed to the maternal genealogy in contrast with the understanding that women owe their existence to the divine presence. What Whitford describes above is not the *imago Dei* in the sense that women are a copy of the divine original but rather the reverse in which the divine is a copy of women. The "divine presence", while said to function as an ideal, is not the self-existing God. Access to a God beyond human assertion is not envisaged; rather identity is established through a process of human attribution. While claiming

5. See Elaine Graham, *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 136-39; 175-80.

6. *The Irigaray Reader*, Luce Irigaray, edited by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 159. See also p. 185 where Irigaray writes: "[M]onothestic religions cannot claim to be ethical unless they submit themselves to a radical interrogation relative to the sexual attribution [*caractère sexué*] of their paradigms.... [A]re the peoples of monotheism ready to assert that their God is a woman?... What upheaval in the symbolic order will be a necessary pre-requisite to achieve such a substitution?"

this method for the female line, in alleged parity with the male line, Irigaray apparently does not consider this to be an application of “the other of the same”.

In her desire to establish identity for women, independent of that bestowed by a male figure, Irigaray applies her criteria to the biblical creation story: “But let us say that in the beginning was the end of her story, and that from now on she will have one dictated to her: by the man-father.”⁷ Catherine Keller takes this rejection of the “man-father” a step further, mooted an alternative beginning to the creation story. Exploring the relationship of the creator to the creation, Keller writes approvingly of the supposition, considered and rejected by Augustine, that creation is like a sponge in an infinite divine sea.⁸ Keller intimates that such a divine sea is suggested by the *tehom* of Genesis 1:2 as a feminised locus of creation. Instead of creation being “dictated” by the Word of the “man-father”, Keller suggests a concept of the Word *and* creation emerging from the feminized *tehom*:

Could the Word of the Creator, as Son of the Father, only unify itself over *against* the feminized chaos.... What if we begin instead to read the Word from the vantage point of its own fecund multiplicity, its flux into flesh, its overflow.... a tehomic theology derives the incarnation from the chaomic width of the creation....⁹

Keller adopts Irigaray’s method of human attribution as the means of establishing the “divine presence” and suggests further that this “divine presence” can be conceived as *materialising* from the beginning. Her concept does not allow the Word to be understood as Wisdom in Augustine’s sense.¹⁰ This impinges on women’s identity in a sense I shall explore further later on.

Irigaray and Keller moot the divine in female terms, with an implied relationship between women and such a “divine presence”. While their presuppositions are very different, Augustine and Barth also conceive the *imago Dei* in terms of relationship with God. But being *in the image of God* needs to be distinguished from being *in relationship with God*. Failure to make this distinction is, I argue, behind the tendency towards anthropomorphic projection in Augustine’s and Barth’s concepts of the *imago Dei*.

7. See Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 19. In regard to Gen 1:2 Keller quotes Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (translated by Gillian C. Gill; Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 42-43.

8. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 81-82. Cf. Augustine, *Confessions VII*, 5. Keller describes this picture of a sponge in a boundless sea as Augustine’s “most tehophilic trope”.

9. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 19.

10. See *Confessions VII*, 18.

THE IMAGO DEI AS APPREHENSION OF GOD?

Augustine writes in the *City of God*:

some people suppose that women will not keep their sex in the resurrection.... For my part, I feel that theirs is the more sensible opinion who have no doubt that there will be both sexes in the resurrection.¹¹

But a controversial passage on 1 Cor 11:4-7 in *The Trinity* would appear to indicate that women *per se* are not made in God's image:

But we must see how what the apostle says about the man and not the woman being in the image of God avoids contradicting what is written in...Genesis 1:27. It says that what was made to the image of God is the human nature that is realized in each sex, and it does not exclude the female from the image of God.... So how are we to take what we have heard from the apostle, that man is the image of God, and so he is forbidden to cover his head, but the woman is not and so she is told to do so? In the same way, I believe, as what I said when I was dealing with the nature of the human mind, namely that the woman with her husband is the image of God in such a way that the whole of that substance is one image, but when she is assigned her function of being an assistant, which is her concern alone, she is not the image of God; whereas in what concerns the man alone he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman is joined to him in one whole.¹²

Read as excluding woman from the *imago Dei*, except insofar as she accompanies her husband, Augustine has been discredited in the eyes of many feminist writers.¹³ Standing against this perception, Edmund Hill and Kim Power contend that "woman" and "man" are not meant to be taken literally here, but refer to functions of the mind.¹⁴ Augustine goes on to say: "[T]here can be no doubt that man was not made to the image of him who created him as regards his body... but as regards the rational mind, which is capable of recognizing God."¹⁵

11. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, 17 (translated by Henry Bettenson [London: Penguin 1984] 1057).

12. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XII, 10 (translated by Edmund Hill [Brooklyn NY: New City Press, 1991] 327-28).

13. Jann Aldredge Clanton, *In Whose Image? God and Gender* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 41; Margaret Miles, *The Image and Practice of Holiness: A Critique of the Classic Manuals of Devotion* (London: SCM, 1989) 38-39.

14. Cf. Edmund Hill, n. 27 on Augustine, *The Trinity*, XII, 12, p. 339. In his "Foreword to Books IX-XIV", Hill notes that "mind" as his translation of mens "means more than 'mind' commonly means in English; it is the subject of the highest psychic functions, volitional and affective as well as cognitive." See also Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine's Writing on Women* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995) 138-39.

15. *The Trinity*, XII, 12.

Power reports that the “problem of women” stems from the ancient model of “masculine and feminine as symbols for superior and inferior capacity for rationality, morality, power and strength”.¹⁶ Philo had accepted this model, excluding women from his concept of full humanity. Power describes how Augustine, inheriting this tradition from Origen and Ambrose, as well as from philosophical sources, used the word *sapientia* for the masculine principle and *scientia* for the feminine principle. Augustine understood both men and women to have *both* principles of “mind”. The masculine principle allowed direct contemplation of, and eventual eternal communion with, God. The feminine principle, being concerned with temporal matters, would pass away. Consequently women were understood to be in God’s image in having a lasting “manly mind” in a woman’s body.¹⁷

In an attempt to reconcile 1 Cor 11:7 with Gen 1:26-27, Augustine proposes the “masculine” *sapientia* as the *imago Dei* – an argument that needs to be followed closely. He appeals to Col 3:10 (“the renewal of the mind...according to the image of him who created him”) as applying to both men and women: “Is there anyone then who would exclude females from this association, seeing that together with us men they are fellow heirs of grace...?”¹⁸ Augustine associates renewal of “the mind” with a human capacity to contemplate God (*sapientia*), which is then linked with the symbolic order through the assumption that *sapientia* is “masculine” and *therefore*, according to 1 Cor 11:7, in God’s image.

A human capacity to apprehend God is connected with *relationship with* God but does not explicate the *nature of human likeness to* God. The appeal to the renewal process is not relevant to the argument: while the renewal process will increase likeness to God, it is not, in itself, likeness to God. *Sapientia*, while linked by Augustine to transformation and becoming more Christ-like, is not *on that account* linked to the symbolic order of the gendered *imago Dei*. It is the “masculinity” associated with it that would appear to link it to the symbolic order.

Augustine resorted to an alleged masculine capacity of “the mind” with the intent to *include* women in the *imago Dei*, although not their physical sex. Elsewhere he writes: “Do not despise yourselves, you men: the son of God assumed manhood. Do not despise yourselves, you women: God’s son was born of woman.”¹⁹

But his attempt to establish a gendered *imago Dei* does not refer to include actual men and women. While a capacity to contemplate God

16. Power, *Veiled Desire*, 132-33.

17. Power, *Veiled Desire*, 135-49.

18. *The Trinity*, XII, 12.

19. *de agone Christiano*, 12 quoted in Henry Bettenson (ed.), *The Later Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St Cyril of Jerusalem to St Leo the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 218.

is shared by women, the way in which Augustine links this capacity with the *imago Dei* is not symbolically inclusive of women (since it is termed “man”). The consequence is a tendency towards a projection of human masculinity in connection with human likeness to God. The *imago Dei* is thus linked with the male identity.

THE *IMAGO DEI* AS A CAPACITY FOR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

For Barth the man Jesus Christ is the *imago Dei*, while the Church (*qua* woman) is only in the image of God through Christ (*qua* man). This primary understanding of the *imago Dei* has a secondary application to individual men and women:

According to 1 Corinthians 11:7 there is a man who actually is the εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ, and from this standpoint the same can be said of every man. And side by side with this man there is a woman who is His δόξα as He (the Head of the woman but not without her) is the δόξα of God, and from the standpoint of this woman, or rather of her Husband, the same can be said of every woman. This man together with this woman is the man who is the image of God, who *is* it and does not merely establish its physical possibility, like Adam and Seth and all subsequent members of the genealogical tree.²⁰

That humanity in general participates in the *imago Dei* in a *secondary* sense is, according to Barth, discernible in 1 Cor 11:1-16:

There is no need for us to pursue at this point the anthropological equation in respect of this relationship between man and wife as Paul develops it in 1 Corinthians 11.... It is obvious that all that he had to say about man and woman was seen from this angle, in the light of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His community, and therefore of His divine likeness, and that it is only in this way that it is presented as an “order of creation”. We must be content merely to assert that the agreement of Paul’s teaching with Genesis 1:26 f. must not be underestimated in this respect (where it is often overlooked).²¹

If we compare Barth and Augustine at this point, Barth appears to assert the *sine qua non* of man and woman in the *imago Dei*,²² whereas Augustine states that the “man” (with or without the “woman”) is in God’s image while the “woman” is only in God’s image alongside the man. It will be remembered, however, that Augustine regards the

20. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970) 203.

21. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 205.

22. Barth writes: “The community, Christians, are also present in all that Jesus Christ is, and therefore in the fact that He is the image of God.... The man is certainly not without the woman.” (*Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 205).

“man” and the “woman” as capacities of “the mind” shared by both sexes. For Augustine the “man” who is in God’s image signifies a capacity to contemplate God shared by women. For Barth the “man” and the “woman” are primarily Christ and the Church; the identity of individual men and women as the image of God derives from this primary relationship.

The way in which Barth understands the “man” and the “woman” to be in God’s image is complex if not contradictory. Barth critiques “Augustine and his followers” for making the *imago Dei* a capacity of the soul.²³ Nevertheless he appears to conceive the *imago Dei* in a capacity for “differentiation and relationship” between an “I” and “Thou”:

Man is created by God in correspondence with this relationship and differentiation in God Himself: created as a Thou that can be addressed by God but also as an I responsible to God; in the relationship of man and woman in which man is a thou to his fellow and therefore himself an I in responsibility to this claim.²⁴

The above quotation has three parts to it. The *likeness factor* between God and humanity appears in the first and third parts: in correspondence with the relationship and differentiation in God Himself, man is said to be a thou to his fellow and therefore an I in responsibility to this claim. But the middle part of the quotation introduces something else: the relationship between man and God. The latter does not explain how humanity is *like* God.

In fact, Barth excludes divine likeness from the created order of male and female in presenting human sexual differentiation as *accidental* to the *imago Dei*:

The differentiation and relationship between I and Thou in the divine being in the sphere of Elohim are not identical with the differentiation and relationship between male and female. That it takes this form in man, corresponding to bisexuality of animals too, belongs to the creatureliness of man rather than to divine likeness.²⁵

The two parties in the symbolic order are not, according to Barth, God and the created order but God and Christ pneumatically connected with the Church:

If Jesus Christ is the image of God, and therefore man, to say “Jesus Christ” is necessarily to speak also of the other – pneumatically, of course and not physically – who was divinely

23. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 192-93.

24. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 198.

25. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 196.

created with man, who with him is addressed by God as a Thou and made responsible to God as an I ..."²⁶

But although it purports to concern the *imago Dei*, this quotation does not refer to a relationship between the "man" and the "woman" at the divine-human level as a reflection of relationship "in the sphere of Elohim". This quotation refers not to *likeness* between God and "man" but to *relationship* between God and "man". As such, Barth's concept of the *imago Dei* is not concerned with symbolic likeness (even between the divine and divine-human levels). In failing to establish a symbolic order based on *likeness* between God and "man", the *imago Dei*, as Barth presents it, overwhelmingly favours the "man" since relationship with God occurs through the "man".

While differing from it in some respects, the capacity, cited by Barth, of being both a "Thou" and an "I" in relationship with God has a problem similar to Augustine's *sapientia*. The concept is disembodied, and refers to access to God rather than likeness to God. As will be seen later, Barth's proposal for an alleged symbolic order carries the added difficulty that Christ's persona as "the man" at the divine-human level is not distinguished from his persona in the Godhead.²⁷ In neither Augustine's nor Barth's theory is the alleged *imago Dei* distinguished from access to God. In both theories, woman, insofar as she is established at all, operates through "the man" or "masculine". In the absence of a symbolic order, the tendency is for the alleged *imago Dei* to be conceived in terms of anthropomorphic projection of the male.

THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF HUMAN SEXUAL DIFFERENTIATION

Hill offers an alternative interpretation of 1 Cor 11:1-16. In this interpretation, unlike that of Barth, human sexual differentiation, as presented in Genesis 2, is distinct from that of animals:

I think [Augustine] has missed a genuine suggestion of Paul's in this same chapter that interpersonal human relationships can to some extent be regarded as a reflection of the interpersonal divine relationships.

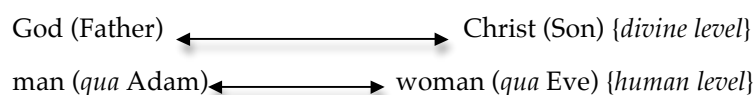
In 1 Cor 11:3 the apostle writes, *I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ and the head of woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.* The relationship signified by "head of" is not merely one of dominion or priority, but of origin, as is clear from what he later says, *The man is not from the woman, but the woman from the man* (verse 8). So here we have a chain of relationships or origin, God-Christ-man-woman; for God and Christ we can read Father and Son; and so we can set up a proportion; as the Son is to

26. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 200.

27. See below under "Wisdom as a Source of Meaning and Embodiment"

the Father, so is the woman to the man; as the Son is from the Father, so is the woman from the man. The man and the woman are of course Adam and Eve; in the case of that pair the woman is from the substance of the man in equality of nature just as the Son is from the substance of the Father in equality of nature.²⁸

Hill presents the *imago Dei* as a unity in diversity at the human level reflecting unity in diversity at the divine level. Here the correspondence occurs directly between God (as Father and Son) and humanity (as generic male and female). The woman is in God's image in her own right and not through the man, in corresponding to the Son in relationship to and from the Father. Hill's proposal can be represented diagrammatically as follows:



In siting the ontological nature of the *imago Dei* in actual human interpersonal relations, Hill goes a long way towards establishing the *imago Dei* as differentiated in an embodied way, contingent on the pattern of the Trinitarian Godhead. Through offering an alternative to Augustine's proposal, however, Hill omits one level of correspondence mentioned in 1 Cor 11:3, namely that occurring at the divine-human level in the interpersonal relation of "every man" and Christ.²⁹

THE DIVINE LIKENESS FOR WOMEN

While Hill, in his interpretation of 1 Cor 11:3, places Christ (*qua* the Son) at the divine level and man (*qua* Adam) at the human level, Barth places Christ (*qua* man) and "man" (*qua* woman/other/Church) at the divine-human level. I argue that the terms "Christ" and "man" serve a double purpose in this verse: Christ the man, who is the image of God at the divine-human level is also the Word or Wisdom of God/ only begotten Son at the divine level.³⁰ "Man" who is Adam in relation to "woman" (*qua* Eve) on the human level is also "every man" (*qua* redeemed humanity) in relation to Christ. The Greek term "ἀνὴρ" has

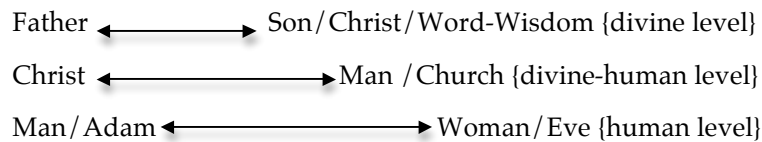
28. Edmund Hill in Augustine, *The Trinity*, XII, p. 338, note 22.

29. In the NRSV translation the verse reads: "But I want you to understand that *Christ is the head of every man* and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ." The italics are mine to indicate the interpersonal relation omitted in Hill's proposal. Hill understands the interpersonal relation between "husband" and "wife" to refer to that between Adam and Eve. In the footnotes the NRSV translation acknowledges that the Greek words for "husband" and "wife" also mean "man" and "woman".

30. See the Word as presented in John 1:1-18 with Wisdom in Sir 24:8-9. See also Wis 7: 21-22; John 17:5 and Col 1:15-16.

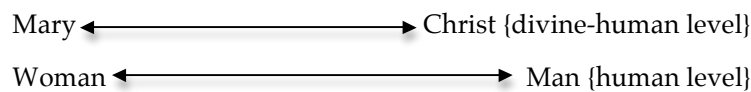
the possible meaning of “adult male” or “human being”; in relation to the woman ἀνήρ is generically male but the phrase παντὸς ἀνδρός (of whom Christ is the Head) is inclusive of women as well.³¹

In Hill’s proposal, Christ is on the feminine side at the divine level while “man” is on the masculine side at the human level. But at the divine-human level, Christ is on the masculine side as the image of God while “every man” is on the feminine side of the relationship. The comparison occurs on three levels: the Son/ Word-Wisdom is to and from the Father at the *divine* level as “every man” (i.e. the Church) is to and from Christ at the *divine-human* level as the woman (*qua* Eve) is to and from the man (*qua* Adam) at the *human* level. These diagrams seek to clarify the correspondence between the three levels:



I argue that verse 7 can be read in the light of these parallels. While the verse appears to say that the man only is in the image of God, the context of verse 3 makes it clear that the generic male is in the image of God (*the Father*) whereas the generic female is in the image of God (*the Son*). The man symbolizes Christ in relation to the Church (divine-human level) and the Father in relation to the Son (divine level). The woman symbolizes the Church in relation to Christ (divine-human level) and the Son in relation to the Father (divine level).

Further, the relational roles of male and female are reversed in 1 Cor 11:11-12. By inference this occurs not only at the human level but also at the divine-human level in the relationship of Christ to and from Mary (as *theotokos* “God-bearer”). See diagram below:



In my expansion of Hill’s proposal, the *likeness factor* at the divine, divine-human and human levels is seen to consist of interpersonal relations (shown horizontally in the diagrams). The *imago Dei* at the human level consists of interpersonal relations that reflect the divine and divine-human levels. The *imago Dei* which has to do with *likeness to* God is not to be confused with a (vertical) *relationship with* God. For

31. See Acts 17:34: “But some of them [τινῶν δὲ ἀνδρῶν] joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

this reason further distinction needs to be made at the divine-human level. Symbolically, the relationship between Christ and the Church expresses a new mode of being, reflecting the divine interpersonal relations in a new way. Spiritually, humanity *grows into* the new ontology through Christ, in a restored relationship with God.³²

Kim Power observes that Augustine's proposal based on an alleged hierarchy between the "masculine" *sapientia* and "feminine" *scientia*, while theoretically applying only to functions of the human mind, had a practical echo in the culture of Augustine's day, an echo that survives perhaps in social gender roles tied to biological sex.³³ The reversal of male and female in 1 Cor 11:11-12 indicates that the symbolic masculine and feminine sides do not exhaust what it means to be a woman or a man. But the concept of *social* gender roles is not the focus of the passage. The activity (praying and prophesying) is the same for male and female; gender distinctions concern the symbolic order.³⁴

In sum, I submit that the passage from 1 Corinthians 11 is about symbolic likeness in terms of gender relationships. When the correspondences are shown diagrammatically it can be seen that women are directly in the divine image without resort to a husband's or other "masculine" agency. By contrast the emphasis of Col 3:9-10 is on spiritual unity in Christ and the journey towards God at the divine-human level.³⁵ Although in some sense purporting to deal with gendered humanity, Augustine's and Barth's proposals fail to make the distinction between symbolic likeness and spiritual relationship, and do not supply a sexually differentiated human ontology. Further, the role attributed by Barth to the "order of creation" in the *imago Dei* does not appear to acknowledge the reversal of order in 1 Cor 11:11-12.

In this understanding of the *imago Dei*, generic identity occurs in actual embodied relationships. Moreover, women are not "the other of the same". This is because their identity derives from being in the

32. One distinction between symbolic likeness and spiritual relationship is the difference between the static function of the former and the dynamic development implied by the latter. The static function of symbolic likeness is clearer perhaps in liturgical examples: a candle that points to the light of the world for instance remains a burning candle and is not transformed to become *more like* the light of the world. While symbolic likeness and spiritual relationship are distinct with regard to the *imago Dei*, the former is presented as a launching pad for the latter in Christian practice. See Ephesians chapters 4 and 5 for the active kind of imitation of God (as in chapter 5:1) that requires the "putting on" of the new nature (as in Eph 4: 13-15; 22-23). In chapter 5, the symbolic likeness in verse 23 between the husband and Christ and the woman and the Church is the *presupposition* for the exhortation to live out of this likeness, governed by verse 21 to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ".

33. Power, *Veiled Desire*, 140.

34. The distinction regarding some roles of male and female church leaders (cf. 1 Cor 14:33b-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12) is not a distinction concerning higher rational and lower temporal matters.

35. See Gal 3:27-28. In terms of symbolic likeness, all "are one in Christ Jesus" as the bride of Christ, collectively depicted as female (cf. Eph 5:21-22).

image of Wisdom at the divine level rather than from being in the image of God through the “man” or “masculine” as suggested in key traditional exegesis. Since this argument depends on a Trinitarian understanding of the Godhead, Augustine’s concept of Wisdom may have a positive contribution to make.³⁶

WISDOM AS A SOURCE OF MEANING AND EMBODIMENT

Bronwyn Neil reports that Augustine seeks “to redeem Gen 1:26 from the Manichaean charge of anthropomorphism”:

They look at the shape of our body and ask so infelicitously whether God has a nose and teeth and a beard and also inner organs and the other things we need.³⁷

But God (the Father) is not masculine in that sense nor is Wisdom feminine in the sense of a projection of human femaleness. Such a charge would assume that God resembles humanity rather than that divine interpersonal relationships are partially echoed at the human level. In arguing that human interpersonal relations *to some extent* reflect divine interpersonal relations, Hill indicates the disparity that operates alongside the correspondence. Such a disparity is evident in the kind of correspondence that occurs between woman (*qua* Eve) and the Church.

The nature of the pattern of correspondence precludes projection from the human level. The divine *feminine* of Word-Wisdom (with a feminine persona in relation to the Father) *crosses over* to the divine-human *masculine* of the God-man (with a masculine persona in relation to humanity). Augustine recognized this change, unlike Barth whose understanding of the “λόγος ἄσαρκος” raises problems, as we shall see.

In a passage about the Son’s equality, consubstantiality and co-eternity with the Father, Augustine writes: “The Son of course is the Father’s Word, which is also called his Wisdom.”³⁸ Hill remarks at this point: “And Wisdom is feminine. This is going to involve me in some changes of gender, which I ask the reader to excuse.”³⁹ Augustine (as translated by Hill) goes on to write: “when the fullness of time came she was sent ... in order that the Word might become flesh, that is become man”. This change of gender from the divine feminine to the

36. Compare “masculine” *sapientia* with Augustine’s distinction between “Wisdom through whom all was created” and “created wisdom” in *Confessions*, XII, 15.

37. Bronwyn Neil, “Exploring the Limits of Literal Exegesis: Augustine’s reading of Gen 1:26”, *Pacifica* 19 (2006) 144-55, see p. 146, n.9. Neil quotes *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.17.27 (translated by R. J. Teske, *Fathers of the Church* (FOTC) 84 [Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991] 74-75).

38. *The Trinity*, IV, 27.

39. Hill, n. 87 on Augustine, *The Trinity*, IV, 27.

divine-human masculine draws attention to the fact, apparently not fully appreciated by Hill, that gender is a relational term. The relational nature of gender is evident in the traditional understanding that the Church (although comprising men and women) is feminine in relation to Christ.

The language of human sexual differentiation provides access to, but does not exhaust, mystery at the divine-human and divine levels: as Augustine points out, Wisdom is not female in sex.⁴⁰ Rather, Wisdom in her divinity is the greater Reality to which the biological female sex points. Barth, however, does not appear to identify the Word of God with Wisdom. Instead he describes Christ as *like* the “wisdom” of the Old Testament:

He to whom the New Testament ascribes participation in creation has only divine and human form, like the “wisdom” of the Old Testament. He is not an “intermediate being”. He is the divine person who acts, suffers and triumphs as man.... He is the Mediator between God and man, like the “wisdom” of the Old Testament.⁴¹

Wisdom, as Barth admits, was in some sense acknowledged beyond Judaism at the time of Christ:

It is now known that the writers of the New Testament found themselves on prepared ground inasmuch as the notion of a second divine being assisting in the work of creation had become general in their day. What they ascribe to Jesus Christ [e.g. in Colossians 1:17; John 1:1; Hebrews 1:2] was not only ascribed by Philo to the Logos but also to the syncretistic theosophy and cosmology of the time....⁴²

But such a syncretistic background leads Barth to distance himself from it. In emphasizing the divine person who acts, suffers and triumphs as man, Barth, unlike Augustine, does not appear to have a conception of Wisdom in her divinity, independent of the Incarnation. Barth writes:

It has to be kept in mind that the whole concept of the *λόγος ἄσαρκος*, the “second person” of the Trinity, as such, is an abstraction. It is true that it has shown itself necessary to the christological and trinitarian reflections of the Church.... The New Testament speaks plainly enough about the Jesus Christ who existed before the world was but...it does not speak of the eternal Son or Word as such, but of the Mediator, the One who in the

40. See *The Trinity*, XII, 5.

41. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 53.

42. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 52. See above for Kim Power’s observation that Philo represented Wisdom “as the mother of creation, as God is the Father of the universe”.

eternal sight of God has already taken upon Himself our human nature, i.e. not of a formless Christ who might well be a Christ principle.⁴³

By contrast, Augustine uses syncretistic interpretation of Wisdom as a basis for apologetics:

We know what Porphyry, as a Platonist, means by "principles". He refers to God the Father, and God the Son, whom he calls in Greek the Intellect or Mind of the Father.... But this Platonist failed to see that Christ [as the Word "through whom everything came into existence"] was the "principle".⁴⁴

Augustine's willingness to engage in apologetics from the starting point of Wisdom may have relevance for our own day.

Due allowance must be made for the different purposes for which Augustine and Barth were writing. Nevertheless, Barth's relativising of the Trinitarian significance of the "λόγος ἄσαρκος" has the effect of collapsing the divine and divine-human levels, with a resultant lack of distinction between copy and original. Further, I would argue that the perspective of "the eternal sight of God" has the tendency to make creation, as well as redemption, part of a *divine idea* in which creation is drawn up into Christ already *perceived* as human before creation actually exists. In this sense creation is part of a *disembodied* idea rather than a historical event. Within the divine idea Christ is both the divine source (assisting in the work of creation) and also said to be the *imago Dei*. Further confusion arises in the way God (as divine subject with the viewpoint of eternity) relates to Christ (as the dominant figure in the divine idea). These difficulties do not arise if Christ is recognised as Wisdom *incarnate*, the pre-existent Word *become* flesh.

In seeking identity for women, the relational nature of gender (by which the Son as Wisdom is feminine at the divine level) is pivotal to my argument. Further, Wisdom is understood as co-creator. This understanding contrasts with Catherine Keller's presentation of the Word. As mentioned above, in "A Mirror for Becoming Women?", Keller perceives a traditional presentation of "the Word of the Creator" as "[unifying itself]...over *against* the feminized chaos [of Genesis 1:2]".⁴⁵ She offers an alternative reading that is in fact presented as diametrically opposed to Barth's presentation of creation:

What if we begin instead to read the Word from the vantage point of its own fecund multiplicity, its flux into flesh, its overflow.... *Inversely to Barth's logocentric doctrine of the creation, a tehomitic theology derives the incarnation from the chaotic width of creation. A*

43. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 54.

44. Augustine, *City Of God*, X, 23, 24 (Bettenson pp. 403, 405).

45. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 19.

chaosmic Christ would represent the flow of a word that was always already materialized, more and less and endlessly, a flow that unblocks the hope of an incarnation, in which all flesh takes part.⁴⁶

While Barth appears to propose a cosmology summed up in the Incarnation, Keller appears to propose an Incarnation summed up in the cosmology. If Keller's proposal is understood to promote women's generic identity in the symbolic order it might be asked whether such a theological mirror image to Barth is not indeed "the other of the same".

Both Barth and Keller sidestep the biblical tradition that presents Wisdom as a feminine co-creator *before the world was made*.⁴⁷ The biblical wisdom tradition does not present an "intermediate being" in some Platonised sense.⁴⁸ Nevertheless Wisdom is not remote from the world but closely connected in that the world was made through her.⁴⁹ Wisdom is prior to and distinct from the contingent world yet reaching out and wishing to be known, "rejoicing in ["the Lord's "] inhabited world and delighting in the human race" (Prov 8:31). To the degree to which she is first cause Wisdom is the source of values and authentication:

And now, my children, listen to me:
happy are those who keep my ways....
For whoever finds me finds life
And obtains favour from the Lord;
but those who miss me injure themselves;
all who hate me love death (Prov 8: 32, 35-36 [NRSV]).

Incarnate as a man, Wisdom becomes part of contingent creation. That a first cause becomes contingent is part of the scandal of the Incarnation. But that this man is the selfsame Wisdom who is from the beginning, is an open secret. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me", says Jesus (John 14:6).⁵⁰ There are those who nevertheless will not follow the ways of Wisdom:

To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another,

46. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 19. My italics.

47. See Proverbs 8.

48. See C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 79. Lewis refers to "the Platonic view that the Divine and the human cannot meet except through a *tertium quid*".

49. Prov 3:19; cf. Ps 104:24.

50. See D. A. Carson: "Jesus is the way to God, precisely because he is the truth of God (cf...[John] 1:14) and the life of God (cf...[John] 1:4)" (*The Gospel According to John* [Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1991] 491).

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
 we wailed, and you did not weep.” ...
 Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children (Luke
 7:31-32, 35 / / Matt 11:16-17, 19b [NRSV])

Rather than being an abstraction, as Barth implies, the divine Word or Wisdom is a source of created embodiment and identity. Those who enter into the betrothal to the Word become flesh are the children who vindicate the validity of Wisdom at the divine level. The God-man does not appropriate but rather reveals the divine persona of Wisdom in her eternal significance; here is the One through whom the world was made, whose way is written into the fabric of creation.⁵¹

CONCLUSION

In seeking to establish the way in which the *imago Dei* operates in gendered terms, traditional interpretation has not identified the *nature of likeness* between God and gendered humanity. Rather it has proposed that the supposedly gendered *imago Dei* consists in a disembodied (and masculinised) *capacity for relation to God*. A feminist search for identity based on human attribution does not establish women’s generic identity in the symbolic order either, but rather the reversal of the symbolic order in which God is perceived in the likeness of women. In both the masculinised and feminised presentations the tendency is towards anthropomorphic projection. In neither case is *embodied* identity established for humanity as male *and* female.

By contrast, the appraisal of 1 Cor 11:1-16 I have argued for here discerns the *imago Dei* in the generic relationship of male and female, echoing the Trinitarian, as well as the divine-human, pattern, with a reversal of female and male at the human and divine-human levels. Although the language of human gendered relationships provides access to mystery at the divine and divine-human levels, the way in which masculine and feminine *cross over* at the different levels precludes anthropomorphic projection of gendered relationships. The pattern of masculine and feminine *crossing over* illustrates the relational

51. See Heb 1: 1-3, John 1: 1-2; Col 1:15. But cf. Barth on these passages: “What [the New Testament writers] have in view is the kingdom of God drawn near; the turning-point of the times, revealed in the name of Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of all the promises of the covenant of grace. To give to the Bearer of this name the honour due to Him, or rather to bear witness to the honour which He has, they venture the tremendous assertion that the world was created through Him and in Him as through God, and in God, in God’s eternal will and purpose.” (*Church Dogmatics, III/1*, 54). Cf. also Sallie McFague: “Current research on the relationship of Sophia to the Logos claims that their roles were similar and eventually became competitive, with the female, subordinate one giving over to the male equal one: Sophia was absorbed by the Logos, the Son who is equal to the Father.” (*Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987] 208, n. 33).

nature of gender. This is evident in the way that Wisdom who is feminine to the Father is masculine in relation to the Church.

Pivotal to my argument for identity for women is the understanding that gender is relational and that the Word or Wisdom is relationally feminine at the divine level. Barth's presentation of the "λόγος ἄσαρκος" as an abstraction runs counter to this argument, as does Keller's attempt to find identity for women in a creative process located in the feminised *tehom* of Genesis 1:2. Barth appears to present Christ in human form as locus for creation. Keller, in contradistinction to Barth, presents the feminised *tehom* as a locus for evolving creation. Neither appears to recognise the connection between the Word and Wisdom and the biblical tradition by which Wisdom acts as co-creator of the world.

Barth's emphasis on the eternal Son or Word as the One who in the eternal sight of God has already taken upon Himself our *human* nature may lead us astray in overemphasising the divine-human masculine, without due recognition of who it was who was sent. But a mirror image to Barth's theology may suffer from similar, albeit inverted, problems. In attempting to promote women's generic identity in the symbolic order may I suggest a return to Augustine's understanding of the Word, also called the Wisdom, of God?